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C O N F I D E N T I A L NASSAU 000753

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/18

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SUBJECT: Pirates, Projects and Wish Lists: NORTHCOM Visit to The Bahamas Constructive

REF: NASSAU 139

CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy Zuniga-Brown, Deputy Chief of Mission; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: NORTHCOM officials representing 12 different sub-units visited Nassau from November 17-19 to discuss NORTHCOM engagement. The delegation's activities consisted of a one-day Piracy conference, meetings with Royal Bahamas Defense Force (RBDF) and with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). GCOB officials warmly welcomed NORTHCOM's engagement with The Bahamas, stressed desire to take advantage of training opportunities and requested resources to boost its maritime, air, intelligence and drug interdiction capabilities. END SUMMARY.

Piracy: A Growing Threat To Bahamian Trade

¶2. (SBU) The Bahamas maintains the third largest ship registry in the world. Bahamian-flagged vessels suffered 12 pirate attacks between January and December 2008. NORTHCOM discussed various prevention techniques that could protect Bahamian vessels from becoming victims of pirate attacks, stressing improved communication between merchants and the Navy. NORTHCOM advised mariners not to discuss ship routes while in port and provided guidance the GCOB can pass on to ship registrants to distinguish between pirate vessels and Yemeni fishing vessels, which are very similar in appearance. They recommended use of the Internationally Recognized Trade Corridor for travel through the Gulf of Aden, and presented effective maneuvers mariners can use if under attack. NORTHCOM officials conveyed their desire to conduct regional and tabletop exercises on piracy with the GCOB.

¶3. (SBU) NORTHCOM encouraged The Bahamas to review its laws on piracy and explore whether the GCOB had the capacity to prosecute pirates in criminal courts. NORTHCOM noted countries such as the Seychelles who have had to release known pirates because they had no capacity to prosecute them. GCOB Participants were asked to

consider their existing immigration laws as well. As international laws become more codified on piracy issues, the GCOB was told that Bahamians may need to travel back to countries where the crimes occurred in order to testify. The Bahamians requested a recommendation for companies that provide on-board ship protection and inquired on the cost of tower receivers and Automated Identification System equipment.

A Wish List from the RBDF: Naval Assets and Intelligence Gathering

¶4. (C) The delegation, including representatives from the Center for Naval Analysis, met with RBDF Commander Samuel Evans and his staff to discuss The Bahamas' existing communications and surveillance architecture. The RBDF said while their "insufficient" naval and air assets were equipped with satellite telephone technology, they lacked a centralized, secure system in which to communicate intelligence to the GCOB or other Caribbean nations. They noted that their nine ships were unable to cover the 2,000 square miles of Bahamian ocean on a twenty-four hour basis; this limited the RBDF's capabilities to respond to poachers and migrant vessels. The GCOB, they complained, does "not appreciate

what it takes to protect an archipelago" and provides minimal funding to expand and maintain the surface fleet. Evans also remarked that the RBDF does not receive adequate intelligence information for counter-narcotic operations through Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) and the Royal Bahamas Police Force. He cited a historical lack of trust due to problems associated with particular RBDF personnel in the past. He made clear to the delegation that the Commodore has worked hard to restore the RBDF image and that any impropriety would not be tolerated under the current command. He attributed some of the lack of information flow to a lack of intelligence officers in other countries.

¶5. (C) Evans requested NORTHCOM assistance to a) increase the number of naval assets; b) to provide resources and technical assistance that would improve intelligence gathering and c) provide resources and technical assistance to communicate (in real time) with the Royal Bahamas Police Force, OPBAT, and the defense forces of other CARICOM nations. He and other RBDF officers expressed some interest in conducting table-top exercises with NORTHCOM and noted that officers found the TRADEWINDS exercise very useful. A representative from Coast Guard acquisitions then gave a brief on naval assets available to the RBDF for discounted prices through the Coast Guard Acquisition program.

NORTHCOM Observations: Training and Equipment Needed

¶6. (C) The delegation held several individual meetings and breakout sessions with GCOB and RBDF officials to assess opportunities for NORTHCOM engagement. Officials identified additional training opportunities in the areas of public affairs, air support (maintenance and flight training), anti-terrorism planning and tactical intelligence, military police support

(through the existing partnership with the Rhode Island National Guard) and medical technician training. The RBDF and GCOB were receptive to NORTHCOM's offer to make available excess defense articles to The Bahamas, particularly cameras, binoculars and night vision devices. NORTHCOM officials further recommended professional development opportunities, participation in counter-terrorism planning and maritime conferences and exchange programs through the Rhode Island National Guard.

Long-standing Civil-Military Projects Revived

¶17. (SBU) Representatives from the Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) unit at NORTHCOM met with representatives from the GCOB National Emergency Management Agency to discuss outstanding, SOUTHCOM-initiated humanitarian assistance projects. These projects include an emergency operations center (EOC) and disaster warehouses located on Great Inagua and Grand Bahama. NEMA Director Captain Russell noted that the GCOB was prepared to provide up to USD 600,000 in matching funds to begin construction of an EOC in the Spring of 2010. In addition, Russell said that he would facilitate the land acquisition process in Great Inagua and Grand Bahama in order to begin construction of the two warehouses.

NORTHCOM engineers are expected to arrive in The Bahamas in January 2010 to do land assessments.

¶18. (SBU) DSCA officials also requested Embassy support to facilitate two NORTHCOM-funded projects operated by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): a Satellite and Geo-spatial Imagery System Flood Mapping and Workshop project totaling approximately USD 147,000 as well as a Freshwater Monitoring and Management program on North Andros Island totaling approximately USD 477,000. Post is working with the Ministry of Environment to develop letters of intent for both projects.

¶19. (C) COMMENT: The RBDF and the GCOB warmly received the NORTHCOM delegation and used the opportunity to restate requests previously made to SOUTHCOM for additional resources and technical support. The RBDF's single greatest need is capacity building, and the visit served as a constructive opportunity for NORTHCOM to assess needs and offer ample training and resource opportunities to fulfill the Defense Force's requirements.

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